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ABSTRACT

This essay offers a preliminary examination of public support for private elementary and secondary education as it is incorporated into the systems of Denmark, Australia, and Holland. Its purpose is to stimulate American thinking about family choice systems. After a brief introduction on the ad hoc quality differentials in American public schooling, a discussion ensues of the ambiguous definitions of "private" and "public," as these terms are alternately used to refer to ownership and use. The third section addresses the implicit values and the historical context behind the American policy of denying aid to religiously affiliated private schools. The following three sections discuss the history and structure of education systems in Denmark, Australia, and Holland, respectively. Denmark has a national system of public elementary schools, coupled with the right of minorities to establish "free" schools at public expense. Australia provides comprehensive government aid to private religious schools, primarily because of pressure from a large Catholic constituency; as a result, the quality of Catholic education has steadily improved. In Holland, two thirds of the children attend private religious schools fully supported by the government. The paper concludes by recommending a carefully deliberated shift to a choice system that recognizes the centrality of religious values to the educational process and that provides alternatives for families with different interests and values. (TE)

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Family Choice in Education: The Case of Denmark, Holland, and Australia

by

Denis P. Doyle
Director, Education Policy Studies
American Enterprise Institute
Washington, D.C.

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The essence of education is that it is religious. Pray, what is religious education? A religious education is an education which inculcates duty and reverence. Duty arises from our potential control over the course of events. Where attainable knowledge could have changed the issue, ignorance has the guilt of vice. And the foundation of reverence is this perception, that the present holds within itself the complete sum of existence, backwards and forwards, that whole amplitude of time, which is eternity.

--Alfred North Whitehead
The Aims of Education

INTRODUCTION This essay offers a preliminary examination of family choice in elementary and secondary education in three foreign countries--Holland, Denmark, and Australia. Its purpose is to stimulate American thinking about family choice systems and what approaches might be appropriate in an American setting.[1]

Choice, in an American context, is typically exercised between the public and private sectors, in large part because in the public sector schools are more alike than different. (That we have more than 15,000 "independent" school districts has no observable effect on school differences. The American public school is the product of a shared culture of schooling which overwhelms almost all differences.)

There are, to be sure, differences among American schools that people do choose, but these differences fall across a "quality" gradient. Thus, a newcomer to the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area who has children and is in a position to select a neighborhood in which to live, does so with the "quality" of the schools very much in mind. But in the case of public school "quality," the differences are almost entirely attributable to the social class of the school, its staff, and students. Thus, a school in the depressed inner city is structurally the same as the school in the affluent suburbs: children are grouped by age, in classrooms, before a teacher who lectures and uses publicly-approved textbooks.

The quality differentials the education consumer finds in this example are not a matter of education policy but an accident of housing patterns and social class. In only a few communities in the United States are quality differences a matter of explicit education policy. Thus, in New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, there are a limited number of "fast track" public schools designed to serve the needs of a limited population of academically ambitious and talented youngsters. Bronx Science and Peter Stuyvesant in New York, Boston Latin, Lowell in San Francisco, and Central in Philadelphia are public schools which have been established to provide real choice for a select few. That they work is beyond dispute. The principal of Bronx Science, for example, proudly reports that forty percent of his incoming class is drawn from private schools.

These schools are designed on European models that to this day are widely followed in all the developed countries--the Grammar School in the U.K. and Commonwealth countries, the Gymnasium in Germany, and the Lycee (with the Baccalaureate examination and degree) in France and the former French colonies. But even these schools are structurally similar to their less prestigious counterparts. The only choice models of consequence are those that permit children (or their families) to choose among schools with different value systems. And these schools in most countries are described as "private" schools. But are they private as we would use that term?

PRIVATE MEETS PUBLIC

To the American researcher or policy analyst beginning to examine school practices in other countries, the difficulty occasioned by developing a working definition of the term 'private school' is surprising. It

is surprising because the American experience has conditioned us to assume that a straightforward definition exists and is widely used and widely understood. Thus, in America a private school is a school which is privately owned and operated, sets its own standards, and is subject to only marginal state control. (Most observers also assume that private schools are part of the so-called third, or independent, sector; while most private schools are organized as not-for-profit organization, not all are, and there is no a priori reason that most must be organized that way.)

Similarly, in America a public school is one which is owned and operated by the government, regardless of who it serves and how its expenditure levels are determined. Thus, a wealthy suburban enclave, which serves only upper-middle class white students is considered public if the residents in that area tax themselves to support the school their children attend. (Taxes that may be deducted from the federal income tax, it must be added, are a do-it-yourself tuition tax credit for the well-to-do.) A struggling Roman Catholic parish school, with a high proportion of poor and minority students, which has an open-enrollment policy, is regarded by most Americans as a "private" school.

The issue is not rhetorical--there are today dozens of inner-city "private" schools that serve the poor and racial minorities.[2] Similarly, there are thousands of "public" enclaves, deliberately created to provide amenities, financed out of public revenues, that are as exclusive as the most exclusive "private" club. To most middle-class families with children of school age, the most important "amenity" is the local school. Real estate agents in most communities are self-

styled "experts" on the quality of local schools, and few prospective home buyers fail to make judgments about the quality of the local public school; it is one of the central reasons for purchasing a house at all.

Ironically, in other areas of national life--clubs, hotels, restaurants, airlines, buses, trains, taxis--we employ a different and more useful definition of the term "public." It is based not on who owns and operates the institution that provides the service, but who is served. A hotel organized to serve the public is a public accommodation. So too is a restaurant, train, drugstore, gas station, bus, or an airplane. There, public character derives not from ownership but patronage; or, in the case of civil rights questions, who would like to be a patron. Indeed, this definition lies at the heart of the interstate commerce clause; it permits the federal government to protect the rights of minorities.

There is, then, a long tradition of law and custom which leads us to define as public certain institutions which serve the public but which themselves are not publicly owned. Indeed, in many areas of national life we deliberately use private instrumentalities to achieve public policy objectives.[3] Of equal interest in this connection is the way in which American society deals with collateral human capital issues of which education is only the most prominent part. (Human capital is the acquired set of skills, knowledge, traits, and attitudes possessed by an individual. In addition to formal and informal education, human capital includes health and welfare.)[4]

Thus, public sector health care programs have shifted away from reliance on publicly owned and operated hospitals, to financial aid

programs for individuals to purchase privately offered health care in the market. Similarly, food stamps are used to improve the diet of poor Americans, rather than publicly owned and operated soup kitchens or food distribution centers. In the same vein, a shift away from public housing is occurring, replaced by housing vouchers, rent supplements and other programs. The reasons for these shifts in policy are not administrative expedience or cost savings (though those frequently occur as a consequence); rather, they reflect a belief that the dignity and self-respect of the recipient are enhanced by such program design.

The Sacramento, California, County Welfare Department made national headlines precisely for this reason. A "conservative" welfare administrator decided that public aid could be more efficiently dispensed by providing a county facility in which food, housing, and bathroom facilities would be made available at no cost to the indigent. For his pains, the county administrator was sued because of the allegation that changing from a cash grant for the indigent to the provision of service and goods by the government stripped the recipient of his dignity. Indeed, in a flight of hyperbole rarely seen even in the legal profession, counsel for plaintiff asserted that Sacramento County was re-establishing the "poor house" of the nineteenth century. (It is an interesting commentary on the nature of the times that in this and similar cases it is often difficult to determine the philosophical or political predilections of the various actors without a scorecard.)

Indeed, expanding the review of the world of social services beyond those mentioned above reveals a set of programs that rely very

heavily on the private sector as well. Working parents may claim daycare tax credits for children fourteen and under in private (or public) fee-charging daycare centers (including private kindergarten, suggesting that the IRS knows more about the educational content of kindergarten than educators do). Grants and loans for higher education have been in place at the federal level of a number of years, and have a long history in many states.

EDUCATION AND VALUES

The reason for this disquisition is to make a simple point: in America, in almost all walks of life, the line between the public and private sectors is beginning to blur.[5] But there is a special reason, unique to this country, that Americans have tried to maintain a line between public and private schools. Most American private schools are religiously affiliated, but so too are most non-government schools in developed democracies. It explains much about American practice and much about the experience of other countries. America is alone among the developed democracies in not providing aid to private schools. This is perfectly natural to many Americans, but it obscures an important point.

Not aiding private schools is a part of a more important public policy: not providing aid to religious schools. Because the overlap between the two categories is so great, the two types of schools are often thought to be one and the same. They are not. Even the most ardent supporter of a narrow construction of the First Amendment must admit that this is no constitutional barrier to the provision of public funds for non-denominational private schools. The constitutional barrier that was once thought to exist was limited to

religiously affiliated schools (That barrier may have crumbled under the terms of Mueller v. Allen, the recent Supreme Court case in which Minnesota's system of tax deductions for school expenses, public and private, secular and religious, was upheld.[6]

Because American public schools were so overtly and openly Protestant, Catholics thought it only fair that they have their own school system, as indeed they did in many parts of the country until the late 1840s. The most famous was the Lowell Plan, which euphemistically described Catholic schools (in the public sector) as "Irish Schools." The process of disestablishing these schools and denying them public funds was not the work of the court. Rather, it was the work of legislatures.

So self-obvious was this that enthusiastic opponents of aid to Catholic schools such as Speaker of the House James G. Blaine and President Ulysses S. Grant never thought to raise constitutional arguments against it. It simply never occurred to anyone of the time that aid to religious schools might be unconstitutional. The way to stop it was to outlaw it, plain and simple. This they did with such effect that Catholics could only secure a Catholic education in private Catholic schools, and so the nation's private Catholic schools appeared. Protestants had the luxury of a Protestant education at public expense.

As an historical note, it is important to remember that for many years in the United States, public schools were Protestant institutions in which Protestant prayer was conducted daily and the Protestant Bible was used.[7] The importance of this should become apparent in

the discussion and analysis of other countries' systems of support for education choice.[8]

Before discussing the choice systems in Denmark, Holland, and Australia--independent systems which receive government funds--we should look briefly at choice exclusively within the government sector. Does it exist, and if so, what does it look like? It does exist in almost all developed democracies and totalitarian systems. But to most Americans it is a "choice" system as surprising as a system of "public" education which is not owned and operated by the government. It is, in a word, a part of the "elite" education system characteristic of almost all other developed and undeveloped countries, free and totalitarian.

In these systems, choice is secured by passage of an examination at successive educational levels. Each higher level is progressively more difficult than the preceding lower level, and the number of seats in each higher level is strictly rationed. It is a true status pyramid, in which the band of students served is narrowed at each upward step. The reasons for this are twofold: in most countries there is explicit recognition of real intellectual and academic differences among students. No one in France or Germany would seriously propose that all children can be educated to the same level. At the same time, the other nations of the world have not been so fortunate, in economic terms, as the United States. Limiting the number of seats in education institutions was encouraged for budgetary as well as pedagogical reasons. Together, budget constraints and "assumptions" about student ability have led to an education system

characterized by a degree of hierarchy which does not exist in this country, even in the postsecondary realm.

There is, then, a well developed system of elite public schools in all the developed countries, which provide for some real measure of academic choice in the government sector for those students who can pass the examinations (or who are effective influence peddlers).[9]

To understand these developments more fully, and to see if they might have some relevance to the American experience, let us turn to Denmark, a country renowned for toleration and civility.

DENMARK

In the early years of the nineteenth century, Danish interest in free public education for young children began to build, as it did in most of the enlightened and more developed nations of the day. And in 1814, seven years of compulsory education was introduced. The notion of "compulsory education" had a special meaning in Denmark:

> It should, however, be noted that compulsory education did not mean compulsory schooling. It meant that people were free to educate their children in whatever way they saw fit as long as the children received instruction in the principal school subjects and that this instruction was of a standard comparable to that given in municipal schools.
>
> This freedom of choice of education has always been a leading principle of Danish education and is particularly stressed in the "free school movement." This movement resulted from the ideas of N.F.S. Grundtvig, a famous Danish poet, clergyman and philosopher who, during the 1830s, was a strong critic of the contemporary practice especially in grammar schools, which he found too scholastic.[10]

(Free public high schools were a much later development in all countries.)

The importance of free public education was self-obvious to most reformers interested in education. The burden of establishing and

maintaining schools exceeded the capacity and willingness of the private sector. Indeed, in a moral sense (if not an economic one) those children most in need of a decent education were precisely those least likely to receive one if it were left to the vagaries of the private sector; i.e., a system restricted to fee-charging schools worked a hardship on the poor. Church schools had long been organized, but their principal mission was to teach enough reading to permit parishioners to understand the Bible. The greater knowledge necessary to work and succeed in a mercantile society called for more thorough and complete schooling, precisely the kind made available to the more well-to-do in the private sector.

The Danes, then, created a national system of public elementary schools designed to serve all young children in the nation. (Interestingly, the Danes still do not start compulsory education until age seven, a practice with roots deep in the nineteenth century.) At the time they started the public school there was a national church, as there is today. Danish Evangelical Lutheranism found its way into the Danish public school and its curriculum as naturally as did the study of Danish. And it was not rote devotional activity, but serious business.

Ever concerned about the rights of minorities, however, the Danes developed a system to preserve the religious freedom of non-Lutherans--Jews, Catholics, and free thinkers. They were given the right to start their own schools at public expense. Any group of parents--to this day--who among them have twenty-eight children, is permitted to claim government funding for their own "private school." The term is set in quotation marks for a reason. Although the Danish Freischolen

represent about thirteen percent of the elementary and secondary schools in Denmark, they enroll only about six percent of the population. Their enrollment has hovered at about five percent for many years, a commentary on the vitality and strength of the government-run sector. Indeed, the Danish government regards the private schools as only natural, because not all parents have the same taste in education.

The government is quite explicit about its reasons for providing the opportunity to parents to start their own schools:

> Today, various kinds of "free" or independent schools exist, all of them subsidized by up to 85 per cent of their operational expenditures. Subject to certain conditions, loans on favourable terms can be obtained for the establishment of new schools.
>
> The principle behind these large subsidies is that, although Denmark has an efficient education system providing educational opportunities for all, it should be possible for people to choose an alternative kind of education for their children should they wish, whether their reasons for this be ideological, political, educational or religious.[11]

They do escape the necessity of offering Danish Evangelical Lutheranism as both a course of study and as a devotional activity. This is no small thing, because there are large areas of the curriculum which are heavily freighted with religious values--sex education is only the most obvious example. Literature as an expression of deeply held religious values may more subtly embody religious precept, but it is every bit as imbued with religious value. Courses in comparative religion or the Bible as literature (the American public school stratagem to get the Bible back into the school) deliberately and self-consciously avoid this point.[12]

To most American observers it is a fine bit of irony that the Danes assert that the way to preserve religious freedom is to provide

public funds for religious (and non-religious) schools. At the same time, and with the same enthusiasm, many Americans argue that religious freedom is best preserved by not providing public aid to students who attend religious schools.[13]

AUSTRALIA The antipodes offer a most interesting and striking comparison to the United States.[14] A continental democracy, inheritors of English common law and language, Australia is in many important respects more like America than any other country on earth. Indeed, the similarities are so strong and so striking the observer must remind himself that differences exist as well. The principal difference is population. With a land mass approaching that of the contiguous forty-eight states, Australia's total population is about fifteen million--approximately sever percent of the population of the U.S. But Australia's relatively small population is among the most urbanized on earth, with the vast majority of Australians living in and around eight cities-- Darwin, Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Adelaide, Tasmania-Hobart, and Perth--all but Canberra located coastally. (Canberra, the capital, established in 1908, was deliberately sited inland, out of the range of the longest naval guns of the day.) And until only recently, the Australian population was much more homogeneous than that of the U.S. (in the past two decades, Australian immigration has drawn heavily on non-British stock, principally central and southern Europeans. The native aooriginal population is very small.)

One of the most striking aspects of Australian intellectual and political life is the set of close ties between our two countries.

Most Australian academics and senior civil servants have traveled extensively in the U.S. and many have also studied here. They read American journals and magazines, and are extremely well informed about

American practice and history. Indeed, there is a long history of Australia-U.S. information exchange, exemplified by Australian adoption as a part of their constitution important parts of the U.S. constitution.

Although the Australians have a Westminster form of government--a parliament, in which ministers are drawn from the lower house of the legislature--there is a division of power, with a strong judiciary. And to ensure the rights of all Australians, the first amendment to the U.S. constitution was adopted virtually word-for-word when the Australian colonies formed the Federation in 1901. Article 116 of the Australian constitution reads: "The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion." By way of contrast, the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." So similar is the wording between the two, that upon challenge before the Australian High Court, American precedent and the terms of the constitutional debate were discussed to illuminate the eventual interpretation. (It should be noted that the Australian decision was based on organic Australian law and did not employ American precedent or interpretation as a basis for the High Court's finding.) In the instant case, the Australian High Court upheld the government program of aid to religious schools so long as the Australian government was scrupulously neutral and treated all religions (including non-religion) equally, and did not prefer one to another.[15] Australian interest in private education was not abstract. As it happens, a sizeable portion of the Australian

population is Catholic; in fact, in most of Australia's six states a third of the population is Catholic. The pressure, then, for Catholic education has been very intense.[16]

The argument about the appropriateness of including Catholic schools as part of a system of public funding for education began to unfold in a most interesting way, however. Because of limited financial resources (the "free" labor of religious orders notwithstanding), Catholic schools had overcrowded physical plants, unfavorable student-faculty ratios, poorly trained teachers (in at least some areas), and limited curricular offerings.

The effect of all this was to create a popular belief that Catholic education was "inferior" to public education.[17] Whether or not it was inferior in any measurable sense is probably beyond resolution, except to note the common sense views that lower student-teacher ratios are usually to be preferred to higher ones, just as better physical plants and more textbooks are generally to be preferred to run-down buildings or out-of-date books. There is a curious footnote to this. Australians have never shared American reticence about comparing school outcomes; i.e., school-by-school test scores, and the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) reported in 1976 that Catholic schools had higher test scores than government schools. Nevertheless, the view persisted that Catholic schools were less well-off than public schools; in terms of financial resources this was most certainly true.

The power of this public sentiment was important in one special dimension. The Australian Catholic Church was determined to maintain its schools if at all possible, and to this end it launched an all out

campaign to do so. Whether Catholic school academic quality was good, bad or indifferent, the Bishops and Catholic parishioners would continue to support Catholic schools. They would go the extra mile, but it was clear that public funding for Catholic schools could make a crucial difference. (At the same time in the U.S., the Catholic Bishops had reached the diametrically opposite decision--they would not build new Catholic schools in the suburbs, which was precisely where the American Catholic population was moving. These decisions were not centrally orchestrated by Rome; each was arrived at independently in terms of the conditions extant in each country. Thus, Catholic education in America became progressively weaker as its enrollment began to plummet. The attachment of American Catholics to their schools had begun to diminish, and the base of political support began to erode.)

The Bishops' decision in Australia was to try to strengthen Catholic education precisely because it was "weak:" that is, the network of "inadequate" Catholic schools would not be diminished in number, even if their quality was second-rate. Thus arose a most interesting political argument about public support for private schools. Because Catholic schooling was inevitable, and because it was inevitably "weak" so long as its primary source of funds was the Church, the only way to bring it up to acceptable levels was to provide public funds. The architect of this unusual approach was James Carroll, Co-adjutor archbishop of Sydney, a "people's padre" of enormous sophistication and ability. A major figure in Australia, many of his "parishioners" were members of the Labour Party. (Although the first major Australian aid scheme was enacted under a

liberal rather than a labor government, labor acquiescence was important--both to secure original enactment and to assure support during periods of labor ascendancy. Like the Democratic Party in the U.S., Australia's Labour Party is ambivalent about aid to Catholic schools, but on the whole is more favorably than unfavorably disposed to support it.) Carroll was an indefatigable campaigner for aid to private schools. The result of his work, and the work of colleagues and supporters, was the enactment of one of the most comprehensive systems of aid to non-public schools in the world. Today all of Australia's private schools receive some form of government support, but the poorest receive the most. Indeed, it is a commentary on the political coalition marshalled to gain enactment of public aid that the largest share of the aid goes to the poorest schools. To use the terminology of the American school finance community, private school aid in Australia is "power equalized."[18]

The argument is especially interesting when juxtaposed to the argument about aid to private schools that was unfolding in America. Although the dates do not fit precisely, the issues do. The most lively and persuasive article on the subject was written by a United States Senator. In 1978 Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY) wrote an article for Harper's magazine entitled "Government and the Ruin of Private Education."[19] His thesis was simple--private schools, particularly religious schools, most particularly Catholic schools---were in immediate danger of collapse and disappearance because there was no public money to support them. Their numbers were fewer because they were penniless and their quality was not sufficient to hold their traditional clientele. Not surprisingly, the weaker American

parochial education became, the weaker became its claim on the public purse. In short, while nothing succeeds like success, nothing fails like failure. Australian Catholic schools, by refusing to contract, had created a political coalition leading to public support. And find it they did.

It is not surprising that one of the terms of public aid is public standards; the private schools are held to the same standards as the public. But in Australia this has a special meaning. Private schools are not "regulated;" they are not held to a narrow and prescriptive set of rules. Rather, private school graduates must take "leaving" exams to get a diploma, and they must take "entry" exams to secure a place at college or university. The standard to which the Australian private school is held, then, is one of performance. In almost all respects, then, they are "public" schools even if they serve a special "sub-set" of the public. By any measure, they are more public than American suburban schools.

What impact has public funding of private schools had in Australia? About this matter there is general agreement, among both supporters and opponents of aid to private schools. First, there is general agreement that the quality of the Australian Catholic school has improved. It is at least as good as the public schools and frequently better. Indeed, the major sign of private school vitality is private school growth. As political determination led to funding in the first instance, funding has improved the quality of the private school, further strengthening its position. Indeed, the head of the Australian Schools Commission, Peter Tannock, under both Prime Ministers

Fraser and Hawke, believes that generous funding for private schools will lead to their continued growth in the foreseeable future.[20]

Second, the emergence of the private school as an institution of similar or even better quality has "stimulated" some public schools. In South Australia in particular, the public schools feel pressured and have taken vigorous measures to strengthen their own position. Most significantly, they have initiated a comprehensive, state-wide, open-enrollment policy designed to create in the public sector some of the diversity and choice that exists in the private sector.[21]

Having said all this, what does the nomenclature "Catholic school" or "private school" mean in an Australian context? To Australians it means a good deal. They believe that they have a vigorous private school network which happens to receive generous public support. They do not think that by accepting public funds they have compromised their integrity, nor do they think that they are in danger of being compromised. They most definitely do not think that their "private" schools are public schools.

HOLLAND To the American visitor, imbued with the notion that the natural order of things is a small, vigorous private school system together with a large public school system, the Dutch system is remarkable.[22] In the context of one of the world's most orderly and bourgeois societies, the Dutch system of public support for education is startling. A century ago one-third of Dutch children attended private schools, two-thirds attended public schools. Today those numbers are reversed. Indeed, so extensive is the Dutch network of private schools that it is hard to believe that they are

fully funded by the Dutch government, and they are required to meet Dutch academic standards.

Teachers in both the public and private schools must meet the same licensing requirements, the core curriculum is the same, and students are held to the same academic measures, as tested by national examinations. (Indeed, although standards are high, large numbers of Dutch students meet them. The result is that there are more qualified students than places in graduate and professional schools. How then are Dutch pre-med student selected? By lot.) Government and private schools, then, not only look very much alike in Holland, their outcomes are very much alike.

What distinguishes Dutch private from Dutch public schools? The major difference is the value system around which the school is organized. And because most value systems are derived from the great religious traditions, it is no surprise that most private schools in Holland are religiously affiliated. (There are secular schools, but they are the exception.)

The history of Dutch support of private schooling is perfectly rational. A country characterized by deep religious divisions, but also characterized by deep and lasting traditions of religious toleration, Holland was convinced that education and religion were inextricably bound together. (The American Puritans, it should be remembered, went first to Holland, then to America.) As education could not be separated from a confessional tradition, so too it could not be artificially joined <u>across</u> confessional traditions. As Muslims and Christians can talk to one another but do not share devotional practices, so their views about education diverge. The example is not a

theoretical one in Holland. Muslims from the Dutch colonies are an important part of Dutch society today. Where do they go to school? Some attend Muslim schools, but a large number attend Christian schools because the academic standards are high. But the preference for academic excellence over religious purity is no less a value decision.

Equally, then, it is no surprise that the major difference between Dutch schools is curricular, because even the most humble subject contains within itself (or can be made to reveal) normative significance. Thus, literature, art, poetry, philosophy, and music are deeply imbued with religious significance and meaning. Although the natural sciences have less overt religious content--as recent debates in this country about so-called "creation science" reveal--even biology and botany can be taught within a religious context. And while it is difficult to imagine how mathematics might be offered within the context of different religious traditions, perhaps Unitarians or Trinitarians, given the chance, might develop their own "new math."

OTHER COUNTRIES The examples developed so far in this essay could be expanded upon almost indefinitely. In Belgium, Canada, France, Japan, Ireland, and Spain, to name only a few, public support for private education is well developed, at least at the level of elementary and secondary education. Indeed, in most of these countries, as well as in a number of developing countries, the distinction between public and private education does not have the meaning that it does in America. It does not have that meaning

because of the American passion for distinguishing between religious and non-religious education, not public and private. Indeed, the public-private distinction is a stalking horse; the real issue in America is whether or not religious education should receive public assistance.

That is as the issue should be. Not because we should be forced to deal with religious issues, but because we should be forced to deal with educational issues. The real question raised by choice systems has to do with the ultimate purpose of education. Why do we educate children at all? The answer is deceptively simple--it is to transmit values, to maintain a living culture. In a vast continental democracy there are competing values, particularly in a pluralistic and heterogeneous society. But there are also non-competing values--openness, toleration, acceptance of differences, and democratic decision-making And these lay the foundation for our economic and political life.

They are the foundation for our national community. But they do not lay the foundation for the more intimate communities which form the ties that bind. Those communities are of many kinds, but principal among them are religious communities. They are the fount of values, they are the essence of the normative life. Without them, education is an empty exercise. Education is nothing if not value-laden; to think otherwise is an exercise in futility. It is this simple truth that lies at the heart of "choice" systems in other countries. They are not attempting to provide alternatives for the sake of alternatives, but because they mean something. If there is to be a choice system in America, it must exist because it is worth doing.

Choice within or among wholely secular educational offerings is to be preferred to no choice at all, but only barely, because choice that matters is concerned with the underlying values a school embodies. The private sector is home to a wealth of different schools--Quaker day and boarding schools, military academies, fast-track Jesuit high schools, Hebrew day schools, old order Amish schools, Hutterite grade schools, Mennonite grade schools (where "Luther German" is taught); the list is virtually endless, because the range of value systems is so broad.

A shift to a choice system which recognized the importance of religious values would represent a fundamental change in the way American education has been organized and operated in the twentieth century. It would not be a change that should be entered into lightly or easily. To the contrary, it should be entered into carefully and cautiously, the product of reasoned thought and mature deliberation. But it is a policy debate we should join.

For many years choice in American education was the exclusive province of the select few. The well-to-do could always choose a private alternative, frequently an expensive and exclusive one. Failing the private alternative they could choose a suburban, "public" alternative; the less well-to-do but ambitious could choose heavily subsidized religious schools; and in some unusual communities, like New York, the ambitious student who did well on standardized tests could enroll in highly selective public schools like Brooklyn Tech, Peter Stuyvesant, or Bronx Science. But the rest, the vast majority, were simply out of luck. Indeed, elementary and secondary education

turned into a sort of social IQ test--where you ended up indicated what and how much you knew about the world.

CONCLUSION What, then, are the lessons of choice systems in other parts of the world? They are several. First, they provide alternatives for families with different interests and values, pedagogical as well as spiritual. And in all but totalitarian countries the state is not hostile to religious values in education. (There are very good reasons for the state to refrain from supporting or endorsing one set of religious values as against another, but no persuasive reason for the state to adopt policies that are hostile to the religious experience.)

Second, they are perfectly practical from an administrative standpoint; that is, they are easy to make work. Because choice systems explicitly recognize differences in values, curricular, pedagogical and philosophical differences are not only tolerated, they are expected. At the same time, because public funds are involved, some measure of public accountability is also involved. In other countries the need to have an accountable choice system is resolved by an approach not widely used in America. Students are expected to pass examinations that reveal how much they know about different subjects--an elegant idea, but one that is unnecessary if all schools are the same, as they are supposed to be in the U.S. But today this is no more than a deeply held myth.

Third, the most important thing Americans can learn from choice systems is that they are not code for racism or religious exclusivity. To the contrary, they can be systems designed to increase personal

freedom and autonomy by reinforcing the empowering communities that protect people from the state.

Fourth, religion and choice can not be separated, for their separation creates a distinction so artificial that the meaning of choice systems is lost. To be sure, it is possible to imagine schools for existentialists, atheists, or agnostics; one can even imagine schools in which "secular humanism" is the dominant philosophy. But such schools are few among many, they are not the rule in a diverse society. The rule would be schools in which the dominant values flow from the great religious traditions. In the West, for many years that meant the Judeo-Christian tradition; and even if its dominance is no longer so certain or complete, it is still the dominant tradition.

It is possible to design choice systems on an exclusively pedagogical foundation, but that is not the pattern revealed by foreign example. The lesson offered by our friends and allies is that choice is important precisely because values are important to education, and some synthetic set of shared values will not suffice. The answer is revealed in the way in which we respond to apparently shared values. We all believe in the sanctity of human life--or do we? What of just and unjust wars, capital punishment, Baby Doe, abortion, the right of a woman to control her own body? These are binary questions. There are no agnostic answers; temporizing will not do. The answers are yes or no. Two thousand years ago such questions were answered by Caesar as he dispensed life or death in the circus maximus. Today as then, "maybe" will not do. Relativism can not respond to absolutes--except in one important respect. In light of conflicting values, societies have broad ordering principles available to themselves. By far the

oldest and most effective is the totalitarian model, modern Russia or Iran, in which all wisdom and all legitimacy originate in all-powerful rulers. Driven by ideology or religion, or both, there are two sides to every question--the right side and the wrong side. Woe to the individual who selects the wrong side.

The more fragile system is constitutional democracy, in which the state qua state deliberately suspends judgment. The continuing political process pits idea against idea; and as a corollary, it permits communities of shared values to form, coalesce, and reform. In the modern state they have many names: neighborhoods, fraternal organizations, churches, political parties. Why they should not include schools is a curiosity.

How, then, is the democratic tradition of toleration of competing ideas reconciled to the notion that about some matters agnosticism is not to be expected? Both the philosophical and instrumental purpose of toleration is the recognition that one person's compelling belief is not the same as another's. The purpose of toleration is not to force belief to some lowest common denominator, but precisely to give full sway to diversity of belief. And the reasons that we would institutionalize diversity of belief is because we have no absolute guarantee that one set of beliefs is superior to another.

John Stuart Mill in 1859, in his celebrated essay On Liberty, supported voucher systems in education because he was convinced that government-owned and -operated schools would become devices for the state to advance the prevailing orthodoxy.[23] Today, the nation's severest critics of education share that view. Neo-Marxist interpretations, like those of Bowles and Gintis, left-wing Libertarian

analysis like Arons', laissez-faire market criticisms like that of E.G. West, practitioner reaction like that of Nathan, and centrist liberals like Coons and Sugarman are agreed that a system of government-owned and -operated schools leads inevitably to attempts to standardize children in terms of the prevailing value structure of the larger society.[24]

To have meaning then, choice systems, supported by the government, must be systems that recognize that value systems are at the heart of the education process. In the political arena--at least in democratic states--we treat as a virtue the fact that we have no final political answers. We have institutionalized a process in which a succession of provisional answers is identified, adopted, and eventually replaced with a new set of provisional answers as it becomes clear that the first set is no longer appropriate. So it might be with education. There could, for example, be the educational equivalent of constitutional federalism, in which the rules, procedures and processes--including a balance of powers--could be established within which the educational process would unfold. To do so would require a definition of public education new to America, but well developed abroad. Public education is the education of the public at institutions that serve the public. The old definition, that public schools are only those schools owned and operated by the government, is today an anachronism.

END

ENDNOTES

[1] It builds on an entry prepared for the International Encyclopedia of Education (co-authored with Bruce Cooper of Fordham University) which dealt with private schools around the world. The research for that work began with a comprehensive questionnaire, submitted to the education attache of each country with an embassy in the United States. The four-page questionnaire was sent to 120 countries, and 57 completed questionnaires were returned. In addition, this work is based on extensive site visits in the U.K., Holland, and Australia, as well as extensive interviews with senior government and private sector officials in those countries. As well, secondary sources, principally government publications, have been used as appropriate.

[2] For a more complete treatment of this subject see Virgil Blum, The Inner City School, (Milwaukee, Wisc: Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, 1981).

[3] For an elegant and powerful exposition of this theme, see Charles L. Schultze, The Public Use of Private Interest, Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1977.

[4] For the definitive discussion of this theme see Theodore Schultz, Investing in People, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981.

[5] For a more complete description of this phenomenon, see Marsha Levine and Denis P. Doyle, "Private Meets Public," in Meeting Human Needs, (Washington, D.C.: The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, June 1982).

[6] A large number of state constitutions are more restrictive than the U.S. Constitution. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a number of states adopted so-called Blaine Amendments, named after the enthusiastic anti-Catholic Speaker of the House James G. Blaine, who had been an ardent supporter of President U.S. Grant. (Grant returned the favor--he was an ardent supporter of Blaine, and shared his anti-Catholic proclivities.) Although Blaine and President Grant were unsuccessful in getting a federal Blaine Amendment adopted, a number of states were so moved. The language of the California Constitution is typical: "No public money shall ever be appropriated for the support of any sectarian or denominational school, or any school not under the exclusive control of the officers of the public schools, nor shall any sectarian or denominational doctrine be taught, or instruction thereon be permitted, directly or indirectly, in any of the common schools of this state." (Article IX, Section 8, Constitution of California) The situation reached a fever pitch in Oregon in the 1920s when the state legislature, in a fit of nativist enthusiasm, outlawed attendance at any school except public school. It was a fine bit of Catholic baiting, and the act was declared unconstitutional in a landmark U.S. Supreme Court case, Pierce v. Society of Sisters, 1926.

[7] See Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "Government and the Ruin of Private Education," Harper's, April 1978, pp. 28-38.

[8] For a complete discussion of this see James Reichley, Church and State in Modern American Democracy, The Brookings Institution, forthcoming. Reichley carefully documents the long and tangled history of the "disestablishment" of Catholic schools, and their transition from public institutions for Catholics to private Catholic schools.

[9] For a more complete description, see Denis P. Doyle and Marsha Levine, Magnet Schools, National Science Foundation, September 1983. A conceptual and theoretical framework, with great explanatory power, has been developed by Estelle James, Professor or Economics, SUNY Stony Brook. On the basis of extensive fieldwork, she advances the idea that the private sector--in education an other fields--is well developed if consumer demand is not satisfied in the public sector. This is particularly the case in countries with dispersed, heterogeneous populations. Thus, in Scandinavia, with highly homogeneous populations and shared value systems, the private sector is very weakly developed. In Sweden, for example, the private sector is almost non-existent (even the church is part of the public sector).

In contrast, Holland has a culturally and religiously diverse population that is geographially dispersed: there are here pockets of Calvinists, there groups of Catholics, here a few Muslims, there some Jews. The effect is schools built around communities of interest to which various members "commute" from their geographic communities.

In the middle lies a country like Belgium--culturally heterogeneous, but where large population groups (with similar cultural beliefs) live together. In that setting, there are "neighborhood" denominational public schools. The pattern is the same in Canada. For a more complete description, see Estelle James, International Comparative Studies, PONPO WP No. 28, and PONPO WP No 30, Program on Non-Profit Organization, Institute for Social and Policy Studies, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

[10] See Danish Education, The Danish Ministry of Education, Copenhagen, Denmark, 1980.

[11] Ibid. For a more detailed description, see Estelle Fuchs, "The Danish Freischolen," The Saturday Review, August 16, 1979.

[12] Anyone who thinks this is a small matter would do well to remember the apocryphal colloquy attributed to the eminent nineteenth century Catholic cleric Cardinal Newman and a Protestant devine full of ecumenical good will. The Protestant devine is reported to have said, "After all, we do worship the same God." To which Newman is reported to have responded, "Yes, you in your way, I in His."

[13] This issue has begun to attract the attention of a number of revisionist legal historians many of whom are convinced that the recent history of Supreme Court interpretation of church-state relations, particularly as it relates to aid to religious schools, is serious flawed; in fact, many are convinced that it is flatly in error, and that all that remains is for a "new" court to deliver itself of a new opinion, in just the way the Warren court reversed

"separate but equal." For two exemplary treatments of this, see Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "What Do You Do When the Supreme Court is Wrong?" The Public Interest, Volume 57 (Fall 1979), pp. 3-22; and John Baker, Roscoe Pound Memorial Lecture, the Roscoe Pound Trial Lawyers Association, (Washington, D.C., June 1981).

14 Much of the material in this section was gathered in in-depth interviews conducted in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, and Perth, Australia, during two lengthy visits in 1977 and 1979. Interviews were conducted with the heads (in succession) of the Australian schools Commission, the Tertiary Education Commission, officials of the Ministry of Education, the Minister of Education in the government of Malcolm Fraser, senior faculty of the Australian National University, the heads and senior staff of the state education agencies of New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, South Australian and Western Australia, and a host of other individuals and institutions too numerous to name. Support for this work was generously provided by the Ford Foundation, the sponsor of the U.S.-Australia Policy Project.

15 The case in question was infelicitiously known as the DOGS suit (Defenders of Government Schools). Brought by citizens opposed to public aid to children in religious schools, the decision was handed by the Australian high court on February 10, 1981. In a 6 to 1 decision, the Court ruled in favor of Australia's practice of aid to non-government schools. See, High Court of Australia, Her Majesty's Attorney General for the State of Victoria (at the Relation of Black and Others) and Others, (Appellant) and Commonwealth of Australia and Others (Respondents), February 10, 1981.

Interestingly, the Australian system had evolved from an earlier arrangement in which tax deductions had been permitted for education expenses (in either public or private schools). The deduction was so small it was thought to have little effect, and the Australians decided to develop a system of direct government transfer payments to schools based on the number of children enrolled; it is analogous to American systems of state support to schools on the basis of ADA (Average daily Attendance) or ADM (Average Daily Membership), which, over the past fifty years have come to replace state "foundation" programs which provided funds on the basis of teacher or classroom units. The existing Australian system is likely to stay in place so long as the Labour Party remains in power. But if the Liberal Party (read "conservative" in an American context) is returned, serious proposals to transit into a full-fledged voucher system will be debated. (Interview with former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, Vail, Colorado, AEI World Forum, August 26, 1983.)

16 Denominational education in the United Kingdom has been the norm throughout British history and was in no way limited by constitution or statute. It is the norm in Great Britain as it is in the Commonwealth countries--most of which did not separate themselves from the mother country by violent revolution as we did. Australian debate about the appropriateness of Catholic schools was very much like the same debate in America.

Unlike Great Britain, however, where there has been a long tradition of state support of non-public education, the Australians had a more limited tradition. Financial exigencies and the pressure of the frontier had led to a pattern of public schools as the responsibility of government, with private schools the responsibility of the private sector. But one major similarity between Australia and the U.S. appeared--the Australian Labour Party--the analogue of the American Democratic party--was the overwhelming party of choice of Australian Catholics, yet it was the party most against state aid. The more liberal political party, then, became the focus of political pressure to deal Catholic schools into a system of public support. (The issue of non-Catholic private schools was virtually moot; they play so small a role that whatever happened to Catholic schools was decisive.)

17 It is of interest to note that a similar view obtained in America; that is, that Catholic schools were inferior to public schools. Poorly trained nuns, overcrowded classes and buildings, out-of-date physical plants, and poor textbooks were all cited as reasons for American public school superiority. and at the same time (the late forties and fifties) American Catholic schools reached their historic high point in terms of enrollment. It may be that there is an inverse relationship between enrollment and quality. In this context it is interesting to note the findings of James Coleman, et al, about the high quality of some American Catholic schools today. See James Coleman, Sally Kilgore, and Thomas Hoffer, High School Achievement: Public, Catholic and Private Schools Compared, New York: Basic Books, 1981.

18 The source for this material is interviews conducted by the author with Archbishop Carroll in Washington, D.C., in 1980, and interviews with members of the Australian Schools Commission, Peter Tannock (now head of the Schools Commission) and Gregory Hancock (now Superintendent of School in the Australian Capital Territory) in Sydney, Australia, in 1977, and in Canberra, in 1979.)

19 See Foothote 7, Ibid.

20 Speech delivered by Peter Tannock on the occasion of the 1983 School Finance Conference held at the Spring Hill Conference Center, Wayzata, Minnesota, September 1983.

21 Most of the foregoing is based on lengthy interviews with the Head of the South Australia Schools John Steinle, and his senior staff, in meetings in Adelaide, Australia, in 1979. Steinle's office also designed the Choice and Diversity Project, an examination of "choice models in public education" funded by the Australian Schools Commission.

[22] The material for this section is based on Dutch publications and site visits and interviews in The Hague in 1980 with public and private school officials, officials of the Dutch Ministry of Education and the Dutch Inspector General.

[23] The full quote, cited in Stephen Arons, Compelling Belief: The Culture of American Schooling, New York: McGraw Hill, 1983, p. 195, is:

> (state education)...is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another: and as the mould in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the government, whether this be a monarch, a priesthood, and aristocracy, or the majority of the existing generation, in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind...

[24] See Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America, New York: Basic Books, 1976; Stephen Arons, Compelling Belief: The Culture of American Schooling, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983; E.G. West, Education and the State, London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1965; Joseph Nathan, Free To Teach, New York: Pilgrim Press, 1983; and John Coons and Stephen Sugarman, Family Choice in Education, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.